

XV.—*The Birds of a Garden in Melbourne.*

By ROBERT HALL, C.M.Z.S.

A GARDEN in Melbourne has in many respects a phase of bird-life quite its own, while this is, of course, only a fragment of the ornithology of Australia. I have selected the grounds in which my home has been for many years for the following notes. To me the locality is full of life, and so rich in birds is the area within a radius of five miles that no less than one hundred and eighteen species have been put upon record as its inhabitants. In the Surrey Hills, near Melbourne, we have learned to look for the birds which come to visit us in the different seasons, each in its order, and if certain of them did not nest every year in our acacias and eucalypti, we should look upon them as lost to us altogether.

One Magpie (*Gymnorhina*), for instance, an old friend with a broken leg, regularly renews its nest every year, doing so this season for the fifth time. A Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo frontalis*) is so constant to its homestead that a neighbour tells me that this is the sixteenth year since the first nest was carefully built in the recesses of a certain old "gum"-bole. We much appreciate such loyalty.

With us one of the most prominent callers that act as harbingers of spring is the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*). No sooner has it arrived than it perches upon the topmost dead bough of the highest tree, and peals forth a series of notes ranging through an octave (no twofold shout!). The joy of the spring here depends much upon the music of the birds. That glory of the summer, the Superb Warbler (*Malurus superbus*), is about to put on its mantle of enamelled blue, and now cheerily and impetuously rushes about, first here, then there, among the wild shrubs and herbs. This is indeed the season of greatest bliss, and those persons who can find time to go occasionally into the adjacent woods, before leaving for the city, share in an unmeasurable joy. Here is one of the birds which should be sacred to every tiller of the soil, for experiments have shown us that a single individual will devour in one day eighty larvæ of a kind

very injurious to the agriculturist. Just as we yearly wonder what becomes of our Robin in summer, so we yearly miss our Blue-bird in winter. The Robin (*Petræca phænicea*) sports its brilliant coat in the open suburban districts during the winter, and seeks the nearest forest to nest in the summer. The Superb Warbler (*Malurus superbus*) stays in our gardens throughout the year, but on account of the dropping of its coat of blue and the putting on of a modest suit of brown during the winter we may fail to recognise the identity of the species.

Spring to the birds of my father's garden is certainly the gay time of the year, and at this season the hedges become alive with the voices of the Tits. My great hope in early spring is that the Yellow-rumped Tit (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*) will find it worth while to build its nest adjacent to our apple-trees. There are far too many aphides here. One of the best of the feathered police of the gardens of this district is the Silver-eye (*Zosterops*), yet it is viewed by some people as a bird of doubtful character because of a propensity to harry the grape- and fig-crops. Everything good in this world seems to me to have an element of evil in it. So with this bird, its marvellous utility in destroying noxious insects in an orchard is combined with a power to seriously damage a fruit-crop. Rose-growers, however, get the full advantage of its presence. The gardener's best bird-friends are more exclusively insectivorous.

Five years ago the Wood-Swallows (*Artamus*) came south in vast numbers and built several hundred nests in this district. It was a blessing for the market-gardeners, for these sociable birds acted as the best of vermin-destroyers. The Boobook Owl also attends to this matter and keeps down the smaller rodents. The Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus*), a real bird of the twilight, appears to be with us always, devoting its attention to keeping the balance among certain insects.

The Red-browed Finch (*Aegintha temporalis*) weakens its migratory ranks as it crosses our borders in the spring. The Spine-tailed Swift passes by rapidly in the early summer or

stays a few days only, while the *Petræca* comes to us in the autumn. The great majority of our birds go from our garden northward to their winter-home in April. In May, the first of the cold months, the Melbourne fields receive a further supply of the Magpie (*Gymnorhina*), the Magpie-Lark (*Gallina*), and the bird generally referred to as the Lark (*Anthus australis*). The flute-like notes, the optimistic spirit, and the attractive form of the Magpie have probably no counterpart in nature. Every field in this district has one or more pairs of this bird, and the rural suburbs of Melbourne would almost appear deserted without them. That the Magpie eats a little grain just before it sprouts is the only grievance which we have against our characteristic bird. The balance is heavily in its favour. As regards the Magpie-Lark, absolutely nothing has been placed to its debit; it is a much-valued denizen of the field or garden. The *Anthus*, a semi-domesticated bird, also lives in the good graces of the people.

These three species are prominent birds in the Melbourne district—the first two by reason of their conspicuous dress and pleasant voice, and the third on account of its frequency. Flocks of the English Starling occasionally wheel into our trees with a graceful “military” flight. The Mavis and Merle of the fatherland also brighten our lawns. Last year we heard the song of a Lark. It may have been the song of the bird that “sings at Heaven’s Gates,” as this introduced British species is prevalent within five miles of the spot under consideration. Gloomily I may also mention the names of the European Sparrows (*Passer domesticus* and *P. montanus*). To the city they are invaluable, but in the country they bring forth a tale of woe, ever recurring. Rose-growers, however, find them capital fly-eaters.

The true Flycatchers (*Rhipidura albiscapa*) leave the creeks in autumn and grace our gardens. Occasionally they appear in spring and build in our trees most beautiful nests, the purpose of which a philosopher is needed to unravel.

If in the suburban garden there is a piece of rank scrub, there surely will be the nesting-haunt of a Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis*). The building of that nest, if carefully studied,

would be an extraordinary lesson. If there is a clump of timber adjoining, as is the case with us, there will probably be a Tree-creeper (*Climacteris scandens*) or a Tree-runner (*Sittella chrysorrhæa*), or both in it. To see the former, head upwards, working spirally up the tree-trunk, and the latter, head downwards, descending a tree in search of insects, is a pleasant diversion.

The Tree-creeper is one of the puzzling forms that lays bright eggs in a dark hollow, while the Tree-runner is equally interesting as building a nest covered with bark, so as to be in exact agreement with its surroundings.

Within a mile of the house are usually several nests of the Ground-Tit (*Chthonicola*) containing eggs, perhaps the most beautiful of those of the Australian avifauna. Yet these eggs are hidden away in a dome-shaped nest upon the ground—an uncommon place for nests with a side entrance.

The Yellow-rumped Tit builds a two-roomed nest in one of our hedges; the Striated Tit suspends its home from a tree; the Buff-rumped Tit nests within two feet of the ground; while the Ground-Tit places its nest, with its peculiar eggs, down amongst the grass upon the ground. A bird that tunnels far into the creek-bank to nest, and that only scampers about on our trees in early spring and autumn, is the Pardalote (*Pardalotus striatus*).

Not being altogether satisfied with the creek-banks below our property, the Fairy Martin (*Petrochelidon ariel*) has this year placed a colony of nests beneath the verandah of a neighbour's house. This bird's nest, being retort-shaped and composed of mud, is in itself a most interesting structure. The close presence of a colony of such a species and its grace of action should be enough to attract the notice of even the most unobservant of mortals.

The Welcome Swallow, with its nest in the coach-house, flies in a high stratum of the air and captures those insects which frequent it. The Swifts pursue the insects in the stratum above all the others. Thus we have three genera which appear to work together and to have a concerted mission. Into our fish-pond a *Dacelo gigas* recently dived,

but, not being an accomplished fisher, failed to make a catch. Both this bird and the Sacred Halcyon have recently surprised me by laying eggs that are rusty brown instead of white. Such seem to me to be cases of reversion. In the country districts the *Dacelo* is known as the "Bushman's Clock" or "Laughing Jackass." At an hour when farmers should be leaving their beds the merriment of this bird is loud and long. They hold "corrobories" upon our chimney-stacks.

One of the birds that has interested me most of all in this district is the White-throated Thickhead (*Pachycephala*). Rusty brown when a few months old, uniform grey when a year of age, and jonquil-yellow ventrally when adult, it exhibits three most interesting phases. When the nestlings of this species fare abroad, it is the rule of each parent to look after the same young bird during the whole of the day, and I believe throughout the early part of its life. There are generally only two young in each brood.

Autumn brings silence among the birds of our garden. The Collared Crow-Shrike (*Cracticus torquatus*) almost alone relieves it, and with a rich, liquid, impetuous, and penetrating voice talks to the animals along the hedges immediately surrounding the town. Its voice appeals to me as being one reserved for the quiet days of the autumn. Nature's compensation for taking away the birds of the summer is the gift of the more gaily dressed Robins (*Petræca phænicea* and *P. leggi*). These birds are without the song of the English Robin, but with their pleasing forms and demeanour will help us through the winter to the time when spring arrives again.

XVI.—*On the Birds of Sibthorp's 'Fauna Græca.'*

By P. L. SCLATER, D.Sc., F.R.S.

DR. SIBTHORP'S 'Flora Græca' is a famous work in botany; but it is not generally known that he had intended to prepare also a 'Fauna Græca,' and left behind him at his death a beautiful series of zoological drawings, which now